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AMGT, GR  
SUBJECT: GREECE H1N1 FLU UPDATE: 730 CONFIRMED CASES; NATIONAL ACTION  
PLAN ANNOUNCED

REF: 09 ATHENS 691; 09 ATHENS 1035

11. SUMMARY. As of July 29, according to the Greek Ministry of Health, there have been 730 confirmed H1N1 cases in Greece. Although there have been no fatalities so far, three serious cases of flu implications are being treated in the intensive care units of Greek hospitals. Health Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos announced on July 15 that the Ministry was stepping up measures and moving on from simply recording incidents to action for preventing the spread of the virus. He said that 8 million vaccines have been ordered and that vaccination of high-risk groups would begin in the fall, when a new vaccine is expected to be ready. The Minister stressed on July 28 that the National Action Plan prepared to face the pandemic will be updated every two weeks in accordance with the development of the new flu and all available data. Meanwhile, sensational press reports in the last few weeks forced medical associations to suggest remaining calm and avoiding exaggerated reaction. END SUMMARY.  
H1N1 Cases

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12. As of July 29, the Greek Ministry of Health announced that there have been 730 confirmed cases of H1N1 infection in Greece. The Greek health authorities estimate that the number of patients may be higher as some patients have not needed hospitalization or other medical assistance, meaning that these cases go unrecorded. Of the 730 confirmed cases, about 95 percent have fully recovered, and the rest are receiving medical care either in hospitals or at home for mild symptoms of the new influenza. Three individuals, however, are hospitalized in serious condition in the intensive care units of hospitals in Crete and Athens. Whereas in the beginning of the pandemic, recorded incidents involved people that had travelled to Greece from abroad, in the last month, authorities have observed an increase in secondary transmission of the virus, micro-epidemics, and clumping of incidents.  
Private American Citizen Cases

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13. The Consular Section is unaware of any cases of American citizens currently under treatment for H1N1 in Greece. Fourteen students from Johnson and Wales University were tested positive and treated at the AHEPA hospital in Thessaloniki on July 2nd but were released on July 16. Their cases were described as minor. Two other citizens were briefly quarantined in Athens in late June. To date, we are aware of twenty seven cases of private American citizens who tested positive for H1N1, all of the diagnoses coming in the last weeks of June and early July.

GoG Response: A National Action Plan

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14. Health Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos announced on July 15 that the Ministry was stepping up measures and moving on from simply recording incidents to taking action to prevent the spread of the virus. He clarified that the GoG's emphasis will shift from merely recording cases to assessing their gravity and likely complications.

A total of 1,000 beds have been made available in hospitals nationwide for patients that develop complications, but the GoG is prepared to make more available by September. The Minister said that 8 million vaccines have been ordered and that vaccination of high-risk groups will begin in the fall, when a new vaccine is expected to be ready. On July 28, the Minister stressed that the GoG has prepared a National Action Plan to respond to the pandemic, and it will be updated every two weeks in accordance with the development of the virus. Details of the National Action Plan will be revealed in the next few days, following its submission to the Prime Minister and political party leaders.

#### Sensational Press Reports

15. H1N1 has been attracting front page attention in the Greek press in the last few weeks, particularly after the first serious cases of patients needing intensive care after developing pneumonia were made known. For example, headlines have included the following titles: "Killer Flu"; "Three in Critical Condition"; "Experts Fear Thousands Will Need Intensive Care"; "Pharmacies Have Run Out of Medical Masks". These sensational press and TV reports have forced the Medical Associations of Athens and Thessaloniki, as well as prominent doctors and epidemiology professors, to urge that people remain calm and exercise better judgment, emphasizing that the virus of panic is far more dangerous than the virus of any flu.

SPECKHARD